

# Informal Supports

## Introduction

Informal supports are the many forms of helpfulness and assistance people freely give to each other in daily life. This could include support a person receives from their parents, siblings, other family members, friends, acquaintances, colleagues, neighbours and other people in their community.

Sometimes it can be helpful to have a conversation about why informal supports are important and how you can get more informal supports in your life.

This quick guide looks at how peer networks can talk about informal supports.

## Let's make it happen

A peer network can have a good conversation about informal supports, and there is much people can share. Here are some of the aspects of informal supports that could be used to guide a conversation about informal supports during peer support network meetings.

### *The importance of informal supports*

Everyone needs a good support network and our lives are made better by having people to encourage us and help us out when we need it. When we need some advice, help thinking through a problem, or practical assistance for a task we cannot do on our own, we all call on people we know. This is a support network and it is important that we all have one. For a person living with disability, a support network may be especially important if they need particular or more assistance in daily activities. A wide and growing network of informal supports is key to keeping people feeling supported and safe.

### *Types of informal supports*

There are lots of different types of informal supports. Informal supports can include emotional support, role models, a warm welcome to an event and invitation to join a group or club or activity, physical assistance, and other things that will help a person in natural ways to have a richer life. Informal support could be a ride to an event, helping a person learn a new skill, inclusion in an activity, coaching, advocacy, problem solving, listening, a reminder, companionship, and friendship.

People can get informal support through being around other people, by participating in shared experiences with other people, and by asking people for assistance.

Sometimes informal supports can be more intentional. An example of an intentional informal support is a Circle of Support. A Circle of Support is a group of people who come

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together to protect and advance the interests of someone living with disability into the future. A Circle of Support is not responsible for 'caring for' the person, but instead are there to 'look out' for the person. An effective Circle of Support can have a strong voice and can help people to identify, share, and achieve their hopes and dreams. Members of the Circle of Support know and care about the person, know the person's history and know the person's ambitions. Circle of Support members might include family members, friends, and other people who are interested in being involved in the person's life in the long term. A Circle of Support starts with a Circle Facilitator who helps the person to identify who else could be in their Circle of Support. The Circle Facilitator will invite these people to join the Circle of Support and will help the Circle of Support members and the person to connect with each other and as a group. These catch-ups are fun but are also an opportunity for the person to share important things happening in their life and to work out how everyone can contribute to the person achieving their hopes and dreams.

### ***Informal supports and safeguarding***

Informal supports are important for safeguarding. Safeguards are supports that promote and protect an individual's human rights, decision-making, wellbeing, and quality of life. When people are at risk of their rights being compromised, safeguards provide responses to minimise this risk. Safeguards operate at different levels, from an individual and community level, through to Government legislation. Informal supports can be a good safeguard, particularly at the individual level.

Individual safeguarding can involve getting to know the person, and their history, choices and aspirations. It also involves building a trusting relationship with the person and being involved with their day-to-day life. Individual safeguarding involves empowering the person and representing their interests. All of these actions are types of informal supports, which make informal supports a great way to safeguard people's rights, interests and wellbeing.

Relationships are also very important for safeguarding. People who are involved in an individual's life because they care for that individual, such as family or friends, can be the best type of safeguard. Other, less personal, relationships can also be important for safeguarding. For example, if someone visits the same pharmacist every week to collect regular medication, the pharmacist may get to know the person and a bit about their life. This pharmacist may then become a member of the local community who 'looks out' for the person. One of the key ways to improve safeguarding is to maximise the relationships a person already has and to develop new relationships and a network of support. Relationships are a key part of informal supports as informal supports come from people we have relationships with. Again, this shows how important informal supports are when it comes to safeguarding.

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## ***Informal supports and the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS)***

The NDIS aims to increase the social and economic participation of people living with disability within the context of the support networks they already have in place. The National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) recognises that informal supports are critical for the NDIS to be effective and that the NDIS is designed to complement, not replace, these informal supports. Accordingly, the NDIA knows how important it is to protect the informal supports in place in the lives of NDIS participants.

In their operational guidelines, the NDIA state that during the planning process they will identify the informal supports in place in NDIS participants' lives and will identify how these informal supports can be sustained.

In recognising the important role that families play in providing informal support, and sustaining this support, the NDIS provides funding to support families. The NDIA funds family support and counselling related to the disability that a family member lives with and capacity building in family members in relation to disability and family life. The NDIA also provides supports to increase NDIS participants' independence and supports aimed to increase the sustainability of family caring arrangements.

The NDIA believes that paying a family member to provide supports can be bad for family relationships. Because of this, the NDIA will generally not fund family members to provide services for NDIS participants. The NDIA will only fund family members to provide services in special situations such as for religious or cultural reasons, or if there is a risk of harm or neglect to the NDIS participant.

### **Where you can find more information**

Resourcing Families put together a fact sheet on what they call natural supports. Natural supports is another name for informal supports. This fact sheet has information about what informal supports are, types of informal supports, and how you can get informal supports in your life. You can download this fact sheet here:

[https://www.ric.org.au/assets/Uploads/70239/ufiles/Natural\\_supports\\_Fact\\_Sheet2015.pdf](https://www.ric.org.au/assets/Uploads/70239/ufiles/Natural_supports_Fact_Sheet2015.pdf)

Community Living Project wrote an information guide for creating Circles of Support. The guide includes information about the aims and benefits of Circles of Support and information about how Circles of Support work. You can download the information guide here:

[http://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/c77aca\\_2ae04360ee97443c8ee3f641b4521d22.pdf](http://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/c77aca_2ae04360ee97443c8ee3f641b4521d22.pdf)

The Government of Western Australia's Disability Services Commission released a position paper about individual safeguarding. This paper looks at safeguarding generally but includes

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information about informal supports and relationships as safeguards. You can read this paper here:

<http://www.disability.wa.gov.au/Global/Publications/For%20disability%20service%20providers/Quality/Disability-Services-Commission-Position-Paper-Individual-safeguarding.pdf>

The NDIA has information about sustaining informal supports in the lives of NDIS participants and operational guidelines about supports for sustaining informal supports. You can read what the NDIA says about informal supports here:

<https://www.ndis.gov.au/Operational-Guideline/including-11>

You can download the NDIA operational guidelines about supports for sustaining informal supports here:

<http://www.carersaustralia.com.au/storage/og-plan-assess-supp-plan-sustaining-informal.pdf>

The NDIA also has information about funding family support. You can read this information here:

<https://www.ndis.gov.au/families-carers/family-supports>

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